



**There are lots of things  
you want to share...  
and some you don't.**

***Protect yourself. Protect others.***

## Living with HIV.

Today, an estimated 1.1 million people are living with HIV in the United States. Thanks to better treatments, people with HIV and AIDS in this country are now living longer than ever.

When told that they have HIV, most people change their sexual or drug-use behaviors in order to protect themselves and others. However, for a number of reasons, some people continue certain behaviors that can put their own health and that of others at risk.

## **Protecting each other.**

If one partner has HIV, but the other doesn't, the couple is called "serodiscordant." If you are the partner with HIV, your actions can help keep your partner from getting your HIV.

## **How HIV is spread.**

HIV is spread through body fluids, such as blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. HIV is most commonly passed from one person to another through unprotected anal, vaginal, or oral sex and by sharing needles or drug works. In addition, a mother can pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, during labor, or through breastfeeding.

# How you can stop the spread of HIV.

You can do many things to keep your partner and yourself healthy.

## Do Tell

Be sure that your partner knows that you have HIV. Then he or she will know it's important to be safe during all sexual activity and to be tested often for HIV.

## Don't Take Risks

- Protect yourself. Protect others. Abstinence (not having sex) is the best way to prevent the spread of HIV. But if abstinence is not possible, use condoms whenever you have sex — vaginal, anal, or oral — to help prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Know all the risks. Not all types of sexual activity have the same risk. In general terms:
  - Oral sex appears to be one of the least risky types of sexual activity
  - Anal sex is the most risky type of sexual activity
  - Sexual activity without a condom is more risky than with a condom

- Don't think you have "safe" times. Even when tests show that your viral load (the amount of HIV in your blood) is very low or undetectable, you can give HIV to your partner because the virus is still in your body. HIV can be high enough in other body fluids to be spread to your partner.
- Don't share items that may have your blood on them, such as razors or toothbrushes.
- Don't share drug works. Blood can get into needles, syringes, and other works. If the blood has HIV in it, the infection can be spread to the next user.

## **Take your medicines.**

It's very important to take your HIV medicines exactly as directed. If you don't, your CD4 count may go down and your viral load may go up. Not taking your medicines as directed can also make the HIV resistant, which means the medicines won't help you anymore. If your medicines are causing side effects that make you feel sick, tell your doctor. He or she may be able to help you feel better. Do NOT just stop taking your medicines. It is also important to keep all your scheduled medical appointments with your doctor.

## **Protect your baby.**

If you are a woman living with HIV and are pregnant or are planning to get pregnant, you should know that you can pass HIV to your baby during pregnancy, during labor, or through breastfeeding. Talk to your doctor about starting treatment to protect yourself and your baby. Studies show that if you start and continue treatment during pregnancy, the chance of giving HIV to your baby can be 2% or lower.

If you are a man living with HIV and your partner wants to get pregnant, talk to your doctor first. Your doctor can explain how to achieve pregnancy while protecting the health of your partner.

## **Coping – when one partner has HIV.**

Serodiscordant couples may face a number of special issues such as fear of passing the virus to their partner and worries about serious illness later on. If you and your partner are facing these types of emotional issues, counseling may help. You can learn how to cope by talking to a professional who is experienced in this area. Ask your doctor to recommend someone or to provide you with a list of places where you can get the support you need.

## Glossary.

### **AIDS: Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome**

The condition that results from HIV infection and is marked by a weakened immune system, which can lead to opportunistic infections that do not affect persons with healthy immune systems.

**CD4 count:** A blood test that measures the T-lymphocyte, or CD4, count. These cells are part of your immune system. As your CD4 count goes down, your risk of developing infections goes up.

**HIV:** Human immunodeficiency virus, the virus that causes AIDS. HIV destroys blood cells known as CD4+ T cells that are necessary for a healthy immune system. A person can have HIV and not have AIDS.

**Serodiscordant couples:** A couple in which one partner has HIV and the other does not.

### **STDs: Sexually transmitted diseases**

Diseases that are spread by having sex. Examples are syphilis and gonorrhea.

**Viral load:** The amount of virus in your blood.

**Works:** Drug equipment such as needles, syringes, spoons, filters, cottons, water, swabs, and tourniquets.

## To Learn More

For more information on protecting yourself and others, contact CDC-INFO by e-mail at [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov) or call **800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)**

Information is available in English or en Español 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.

The number for callers with **TTY equipment** is **888-232-6348**.

Your call is free and private.  
You can also get more information at [www.cdc.gov/PreventionISCare](http://www.cdc.gov/PreventionISCare).

PREVENTION  IS CARE  
Protect Yourself. Protect Others.